

## By STUART EARP: Wycombe Wanderers 2, Staines Town 1

A SCRAMBLED goal just one minute from time in Saturday's Rothmans Isthmian League encounter gave Wycombe Wanderers a winning start to the new campaign against Staines at Loakes Park. But while the supporters went home happy, Wanderers themselves must realise there is a good deal of work to be done.

Saturday's match was a game of two different halves, with the Blues dominating the first and then allowing Staines to dictate the pattern in the second. In the end, Howard Kennedy's 89th minute winner was an unexpected bonus, for most of us had settled for a 1-1 scoreline.

Part of Wycombe's problems on Saturday came in just the third minute — they scored. That early breakthrough, although welcome at the time, took the edge off their overall performance. The main struggle was in midfield where Kennedy, Derek Cotterell and Dave Alexander were outshone by their counterparts. "Alex" in particular had an unhappy game while Kennedy seemed inactive for long periods. Cotterell ran and challenged aggressively but was always fighting a losing battle.

With midfield ineffective, the front runners had a pretty lean time but overall, they created more chances than last year's Division Two champions. That, at least, is something Manager Brian Lee can be pleased with although he will want a good deal more of them put away in future.

Saturday's team was as expected with John Delaney and Ray Eaton coming into the defence, Cotterell in midfield and Derek Harris and Geoff Anthony upfront. Of the newcomers, I felt Eaton was the most impressive. An attacking left back, he went a long way to filling the considerable gap left by the talented Gary Hand.

Staines epitomised many Division One sides. Hard work was their motto and it almost earned them a point. Apart from one or two players, they generally lacked skill but made up for that deficiency with work rate. They tended to be too aggressive at times and owing to referee Barnes' leniency, it went unchecked.

The crowd had hardly time to settle down before they were cheering the first league goal of the season. It came from a free kick which Paul Birdseye pushed to Anthony. He took the ball to within five yards of the byeline but with young Richie Brown shadowing him, there seemed no way Geoff could get the ball over. Yet somehow he pulled it across and Harris helped it on at the near post. Tony Horseman let the ball bounce once and then guided a header just inside the far post.

For a time, Wycombe combined well, notably Birdseye and Anthony on the top wing. Then, after 18 minutes, Staines fought themselves back into the game with an equaliser. Keith Bristow did well to get his cross into the penalty area where Delaney headed clear but only as far as Billy Salkeld who drove the ball past the unsighted John Maskell from 15 yards. This well taken goal showed just why Salkeld, a talented footballer, scored 18 from midfield last season.

With more luck they could have been two goals clear and as a unit, they were combining reasonably well for an early season game. The second half was a different story.

Wycombe lost their way in midfield where Staines put on considerable pressure and denied their opponents any time or space to create attacks. The passing suffered accordingly. In fact it was Staines who looked more likely to run off with the three points. They might well have done too, had it not been for an excellent save from Maskell after 69 minutes. Wycombe were slow to clear a corner and Williams took advantage to rocket a shot towards the top of the net only to see his former team-mate push the ball over.

As the match approached its closing stages it seemed Wycombe must produce something in the last quarter. They had struggled for half an hour in the second half and predictably, they mounted a severe assault on Staines. Yates saved a Kennedy drive with his

legs and Dylan Evans, a 69th minute substitute for Anthony, blazed over the top after a good ball from Alexander.

When Yates once again deprived Horseman by diving at the striker's feet, it seemed Wycombe would not get through. Then, in the last minute, they won a corner. Horseman curled the ball into the six yard box where Kennedy missed his header. Staines, however, were slow to clear. The ball bobbed around amongst a sea of legs until Kennedy, recovering well, rammed a shot just inside the upright to almost audible sighs of relief all around Loakes Park.

**WYCOMBE:** J. Maskell, P. Birdseye, K. Mead, J. Delaney, R. Eaton, H. Kennedy, D. Cotterell, D. Alexander, A. Horseman, D. Harris, G. Anthony (sub. D. Evans 69 mins).

**STAINES:** G. Yates, B. O'Sullivan, R. Williams, T. McCready, R. Brown, M. Bax, W. Aalkeld, K. Bristow, T. Soutar (sub. G. O'Rourke 72 mins), J. Ritchie, A. Rowlands.

**Referee:** A. Barnes (Palmer's Green).

**Halftime:** 1-1. **Goalscorers,** Wycombe — Horseman (3), Kennedy (89). Staines — Salkeld (18).

**Official paying attendance:** 1,506. **Approximate total attendance** 1,900.

Although taken aback by the Staines goal, Wanderers pressed forward again. Anthony looked to have a good case for a penalty when barged down by former Wanderer Rob Williams. Delaney went close and Brown cleared off the line from Keith Mead. Then just before half time Staines' keeper Graham Yates saved his side when he dived bravely at Horseman's feet.

Although it was level pegging, the Blues could feel satisfied with their first half perfor-